

methods. Few of us have been prepared to tell a patient or his family that treatment is possible but cannot be given for economic reasons. Yet this is the situation that is being faced more often by hospital specialists. At present they generally save themselves and their patients distress by suggesting that there are medical grounds for withholding treatment. This well intentioned deception will become less and less possible in the years ahead.

Benefits for man and animals

The article by Dr Lane-Petter on page 118 and the comments which follow it enable the ethical issues of experiments on animals to be much more clearly discerned than previously for they are freed, on the one hand, from the usual falsehoods and distortions of anti-vivisectionist propaganda, and, on the other, from a tendency to bland dismissal of any possible guilt by those who use animals for biological research. But the debate is incomplete. There is no mention of the vast benefits conferred on animals themselves by animal experiments. Veterinary practice has been as much advanced by animal work as has medical science. The reduction of suffering which these advances have conferred on animals in homes and on farms has been parallel with the ever-widening relief of human suffering. Nor is the question of the relative intensity of suffering by man and animals caused by pain and fear examined. It is evident to any doctor that humans differ widely in their response to pain and animals must similarly differ from man. There is no comparison between the two in mental suffering. The dog trots happily to the laboratory where he will undergo a non-survival experiment unlike the condemned criminal approaching the scaffold. Remove the anticipation of and meditation on pain from the human sufferer and half of it has gone. Apart from primates we can be confident that few animals suffer from pain as do humans in this way. Nor is the

evolutionary aspect considered. God, or natural selection, evolved carnivores to prey upon their fellow creatures without giving them any anaesthetics, and some, as with cat and mouse, prolong their victim's death. Man, an omnivore, has, except in a few cults, followed this evolutionary road. Biological science, aided by animal experiment, has enabled him to provide pain-free methods of slaughter. It is perhaps wrong to use an evolutionary test for ethical principles, for man evolved as an inter-tribal warring species and we now seek to find alternatives to the evils of war because of the suffering it causes. Here is the fundamental ethical principle to which we can all subscribe.

The debate on alternative methods for biological research is unusual in so far as we find economy and ethics working hand in hand. For this reason the animal experimenters say that if such methods were valid, they would use them. FRAME¹ maintains that insufficient effort is made to develop them and test their validity. If this is true, more support should be provided by the research councils for such work.

The question that confronts us all is how to ensure that action is taken to lessen the unnecessary use of animals for experiments which cause pain. All who are concerned with animal welfare should urge their Members of Parliament to bring continual pressure on the Home Secretary to end the 10 years of neglect of the Littlewood Committee's recommendations that a reconstituted advisory committee should be set up with terms of reference widened to include consideration of the ethical questions considered in paragraph 237 of that report and discussed at length by Dr Lane-Petter. Animal experiments have conferred such benefits on both man and animals that they must continue but only insofar as they are necessary for human and animal welfare.

¹Fund for the replacement of animals in medical experiments.